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HEADLINE: CURRIE INQUIRY EXTENDS REACH;
AS SENATOR RETAINS PROMINENT LAWYER, GRAND JURY PURSUES MONDAWMIN LINKS

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BODY:

State Sen. Ulysses Currie has added prominent Baltimore defense attorney William H. Murphy Jr. to his legal team as the federal investigation into the Prince George's County Democrat has expanded to include inquiries about West Baltimore's Mondawmin Mall.

The Maryland Transit Administration released yesterday a federal grand jury subpoena directing the agency to produce "communications or contacts of any sort with Ulysses Currie or anyone acting on his behalf pertaining to any matters concerning shopping centers or grocery stores to include, but not be limited to, the Mondawmin Mall."

Currie is under investigation by the FBI and the U.S. attorney's office in connection with his previously undisclosed consulting work for Shoppers Food and Pharmacy, a regional grocery chain based in Lanham. In November, a Shoppers store opened at Mondawmin as part of a redevelopment of the mall, which had been declining in recent years.

John P. Cahalan, a spokesman for the Maryland Department of Transportation, said yesterday that a grand jury subpoena was also received by the Motor Vehicle Administration, which has a branch office at Mondawmin. That subpoena also requests information relating to Currie, Shoppers, other grocery stores and Mondawmin, Cahalan said.

The State Highway Administration also released yesterday a federal subpoena requesting documents relating to Shoppers and to Currie. All three subpoenas to divisions of the Department of Transportation were sent June 6 and demand a response by June 25. The agencies are working to comply with the requests, Cahalan said.

In addition to former federal prosecutor turned defense attorney Dale Kelberman, Currie has recently retained well-known Baltimore attorney Murphy as legal counsel.

"All great men deserve at least two great lawyers," Murphy said yesterday. The attorney, a longtime friend of Currie's, predicted his client would be exonerated. "When the dust settles, they will find Senator Currie has not

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committed any criminal conduct at all."

In the meantime, Currie - whose District Heights home was raided by the FBI late last month - appears concerned about mounting legal bills.

"May I use my campaign funds to pay my legal counsel during the course of this investigation?" Currie asked in a June 12 letter to Jared DeMarinis, the director of the campaign finance division of the Maryland State Board of Elections.

DeMarinis said yesterday that he intends to seek clarification from the attorney general's office before responding.

According to a 1993 opinion by then-Attorney General J. Joseph Curran Jr., "an official may use campaign funds to pay debts incurred in the defense of a criminal prosecution" only if they are "directly related to alleged campaign improprieties."

Currie had nearly \$360,000 in his campaign fund as of February, according to campaign finance filings.

The FBI and the U.S. attorney's office declined again yesterday to discuss details of their investigation, but it appears to center on Currie's work for Shoppers in recent years. According to the grocery store chain's parent company, Supervalu Inc., the chairman of the powerful Budget and Taxation Committee has been an "outside consultant" for the 64-store Shoppers chain.

On at least several occasions, Currie got involved in state business concerning Shoppers.

He apparently asked state highway officials in 2005 to expedite a traffic-light project near a shopping center where the grocery chain planned to open a store, according to an e-mail from State Highway Administrator Neil J. Pedersen. Pedersen was interviewed by federal officials June 9, Cahalan said.

Also in 2005, the county delegation that included Currie sponsored a bill that facilitated the transfer of a liquor license from one Shoppers store to another. And in 2006, Currie attended meetings during which Washington Metro officials, Prince George's County officials and Shoppers representatives discussed the possible commercial development of an area near the West Hyattsville Metro station.

There are so far no indications that Currie intervened on behalf of Shoppers at Mondawmin Mall.

The state has pledged \$1.8 million to the mall, which would go to the mall's owner, General Growth Properties, for renovation of the property. The city also kicked in \$15 million in tax increment financing for an expansion of the mall. But M.J. "Jay" Brodie, president of the Baltimore Development Corp., said Shoppers has not received any direct financial incentives from the city.

Asked whether Currie attended meetings regarding the Mondawmin redevelopment or contacted anyone at the Baltimore Development Corp. about the new Shoppers store there, William L. Beckford, a BDC managing director said: "As the lead person on the Mondawmin Mall project, my personal answer to both of your questions ... is no."

Karen Glenn-Hood, a spokeswoman for the Maryland Department of Business and Economic Development, has said neither Shoppers Food nor Supervalu is a direct beneficiary of state subsidies.

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Sun reporters Laura Smitherman and Julie Bykowicz contributed to this article.

GRAPHIC: Photo(s)
CURRIE

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